



## ANNUAL BULLETIN VOL. 37 1994

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## Some Pargetting in Colchester

*by Richard Shackle*

In November 1995 the staff of the Castle Museum were doing some work on the Lucas vault when they discovered a large hole under the floor. This hole was about ten foot square and ten feet deep. It had straight masonry sides and no sign of any staircase. The museum current theory is that this may have been the castle's oubliette built by the Normans.

Inside the hole was stacked a heap of moulded plasterwork on laths. There were three plaster artefacts present.

- 1) An oval plaque with the date 1702 on it.
- 2) A plaster ceiling about eight foot square cut up into pieces two foot square.
- 3) Fragments of pargetting with a floral pattern.

There was also a small wooden door with the words Mr Rogers Cistern Yard North Hill written on it. 1) The plaster Plaque dated 1702 (COLEM: 219.1933)

This is mentioned in the Report of the Museum and muniment committee for the two years ending 31 March 1935. It says under the heading Architectural Remains: "Plaster plaque, bearing date 1702, taken from a house in Cistern Yard, North Hill, demolished in 1932 given by Mr E Rogers." This is obviously what the writing on the small door is referring to. The museum has a photograph showing this plaque in situ in the house in Cistern Yard (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Photograph of Cistern Yard Colchester 1932 showing plaque of 1702  
(Photograph from the Laver Collection)

### 2) The plaster ceiling (COLEM: 431.1930).

This had been cut up into several pieces and carefully stacked, but some of the lower layers had rotted away to dust since the 1930's. There was enough left to make a reconstruction of the ceiling. Figure 2 shows the fragments found. Figure 3 shows my reconstruction of what the ceiling might have looked like. The moulding projects about two inches from the surface of the plaster. Stylised floral motifs (fig 4) and tudor rose bosses are joined together by ribs. It is difficult to date the ceiling, it could date anywhere from 1500 to 1800 AD but probably dates from about 1600 AD. It could have come from a ceiling

eight foot square or perhaps more likely from a ceiling divided into four by two large ceiling beams. In which case it could have come from a ceiling seventeen foot square. This ceiling is probably the one referred to in the Castle Museum's Annual Report 1930-31. On page 49 it says "plaster ceiling and wall ornaments from 10 Maidenburgh Street, c1600, divided into panels intersecting ribs with foliated bosses and terminals".

The closest parallel I have found to this ceiling is at St Michael's Manor in St Albans which incorporates a plaque dated 1586 (Puloy, M. 1982).

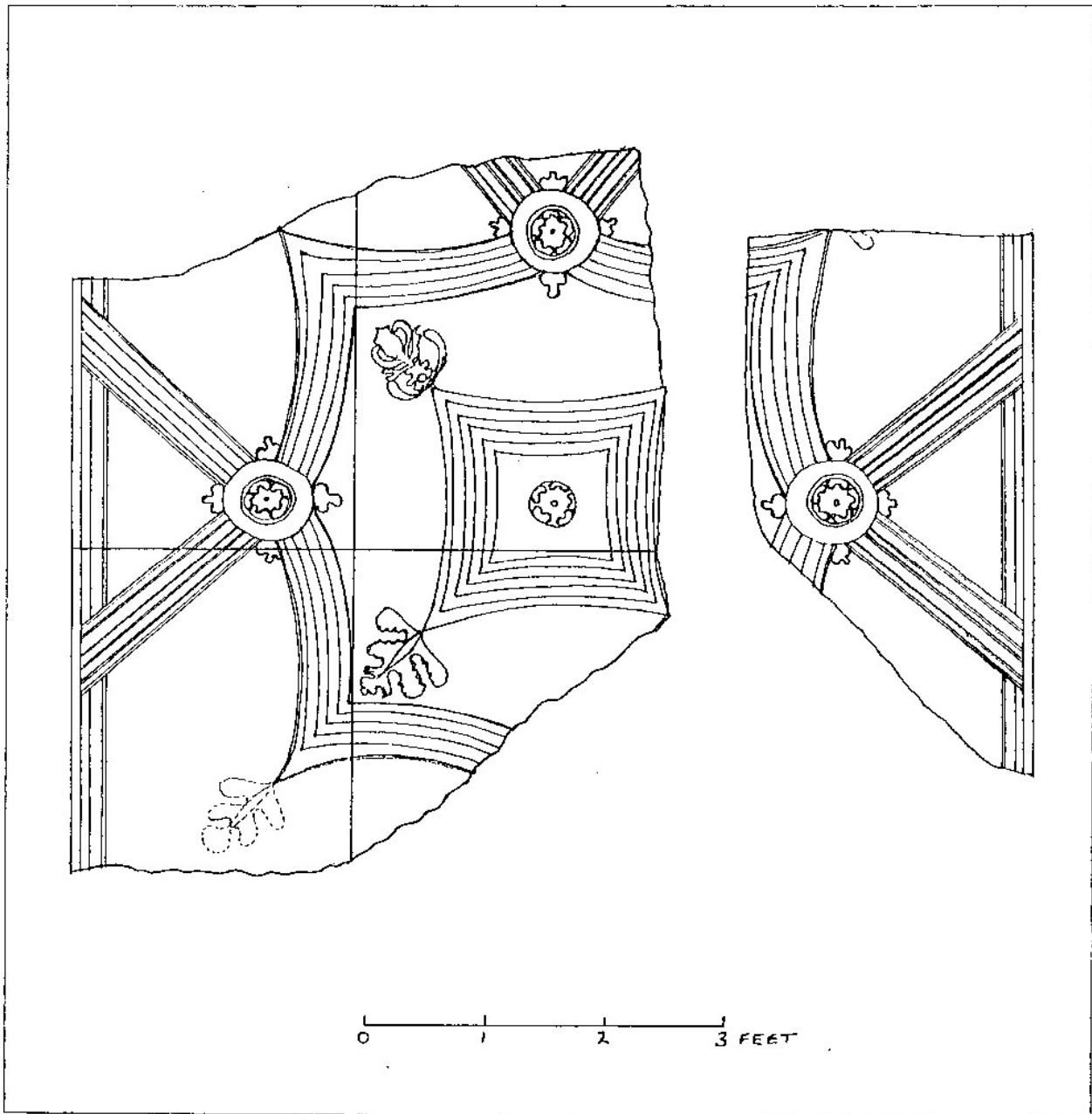


Figure 2. Fragments of a plaster ceiling

### 3) Fragments of pargetting (COLEM: 757.1930).

There are several fragments of strapwork (Figures 5 and 6), including one piece which may be the letter "C". This could be the item referred to in the Museum Annual Report 1930-31, p50, "38-39 High Street, in projecting back wing, pargetting c1650 AD, floral scrolls and initials R C D". This discovery is mentioned in The Essex County Standard of 29 November 1930 in an article on the demolition of 38-39 High Street. It says the pargetting was on the east face of the crosswing and that an endeavour was made to remove the pargetting intact but this proved impracticable, however it was hoped that portions would be preserved in The Colchester and East Essex Museum. There was also a photograph of the pargetting but it was too dark for any detail to be made out.

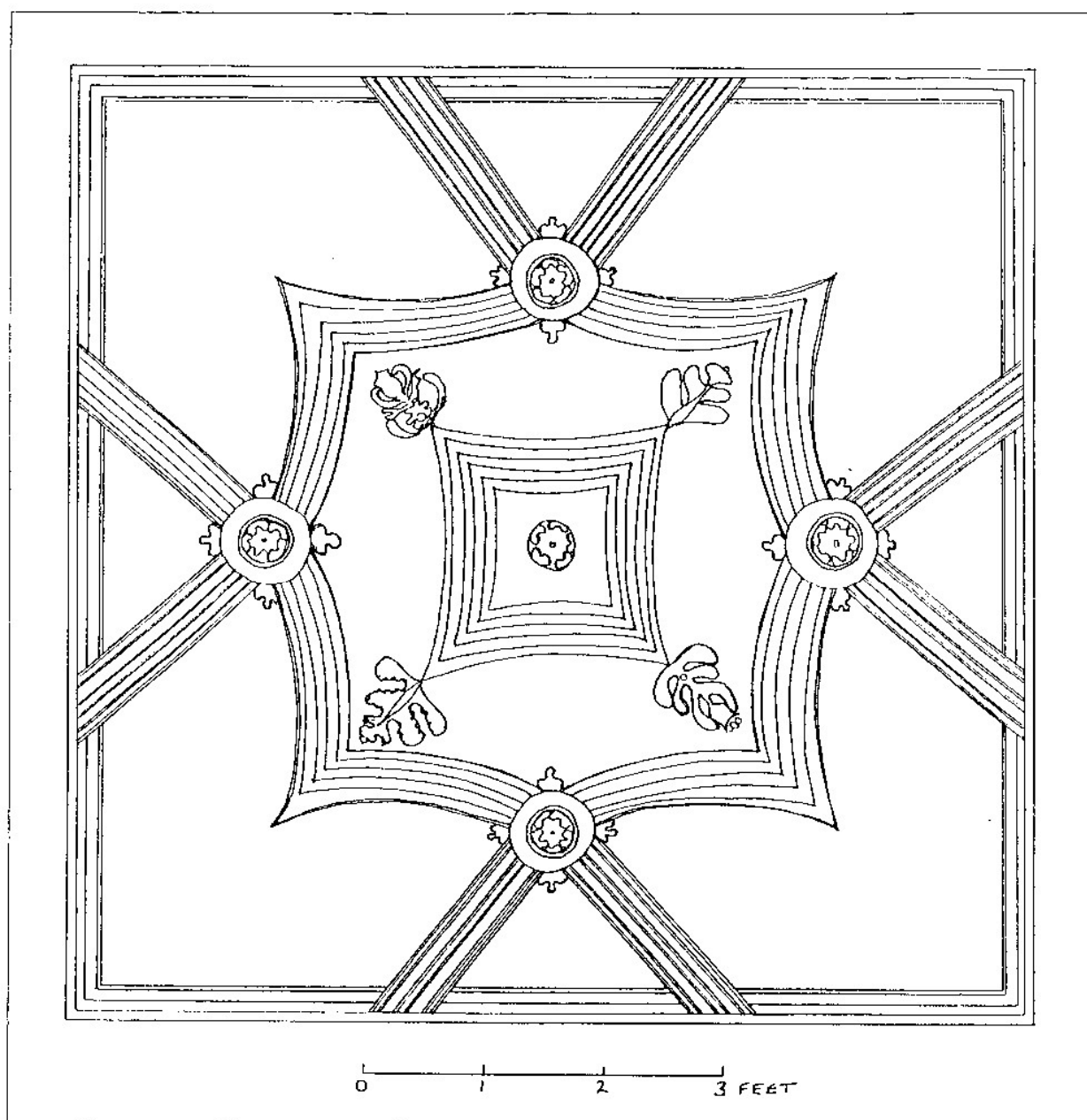
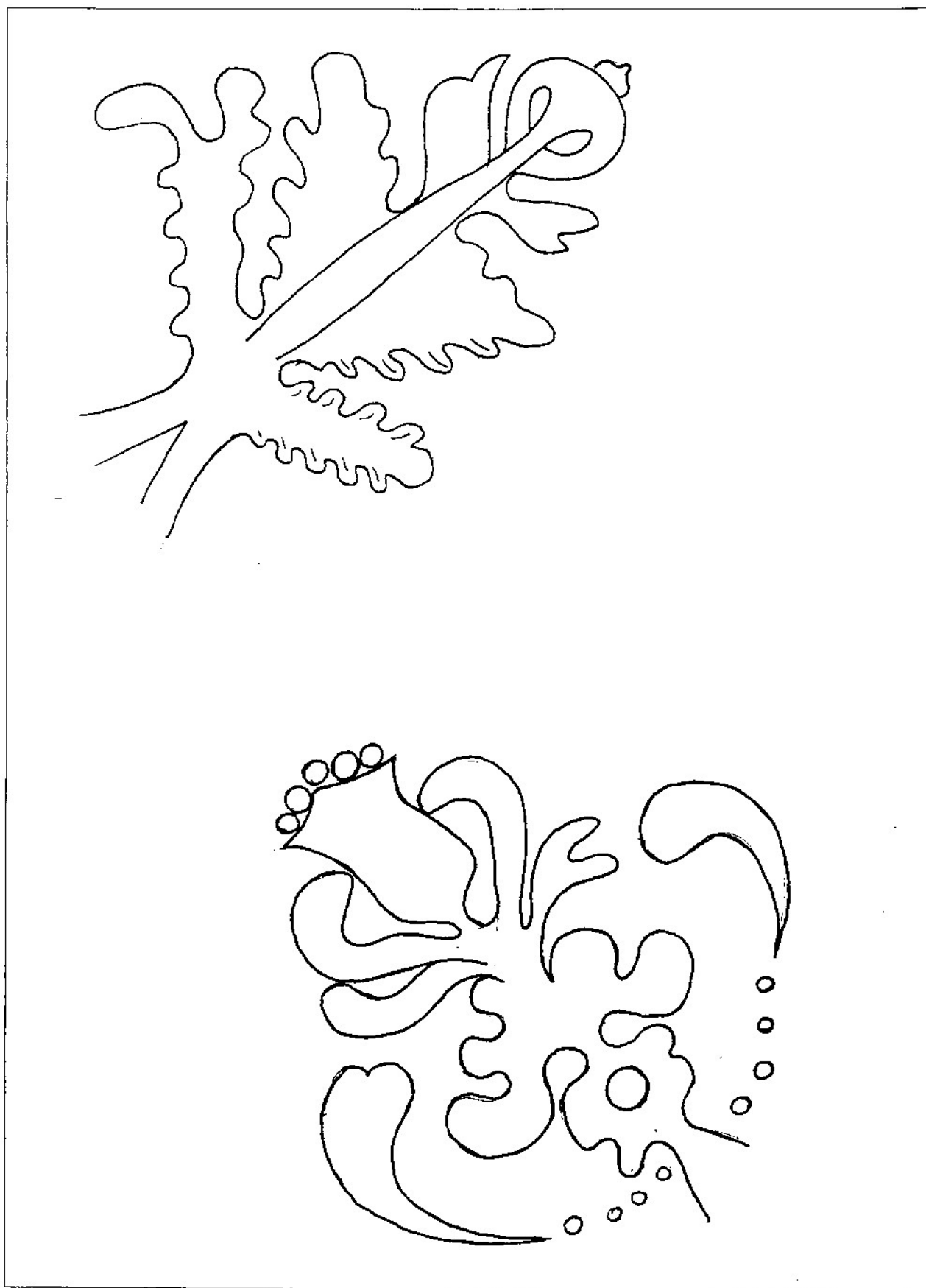


Figure 3. Reconstruction of a plaster ceiling

## REFERENCES

- Puloy, M            *Decorative plasterwork in Hertfordshire*, Hertfordshire Archaeology, **8**, 1980-82, p 144-199.
- ...                Essex County Standard, 29 November 1930.



*Figure 4. Floral motifs from plaster ceiling*

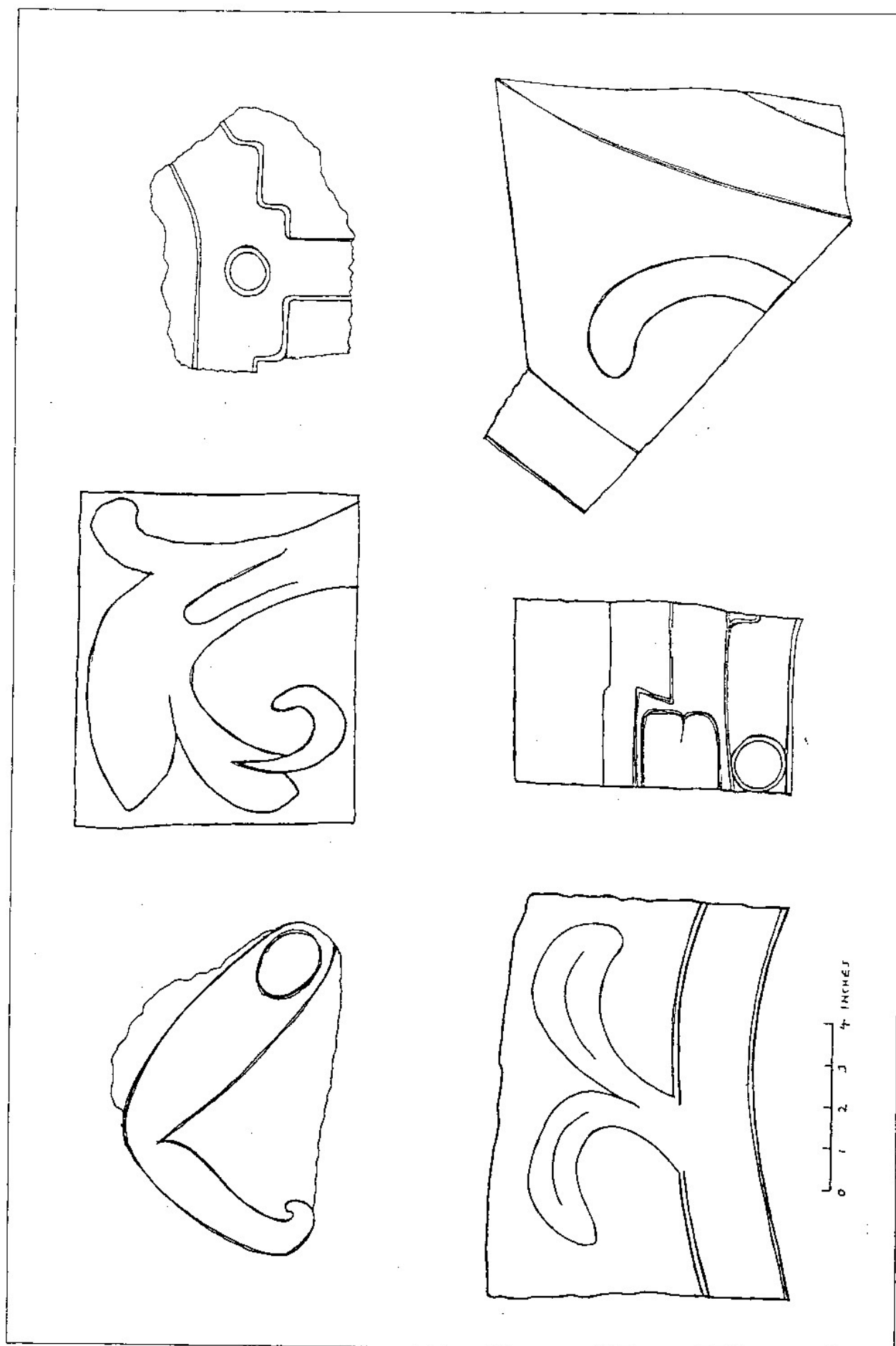


Figure 5. Fragments of strapwork (A)

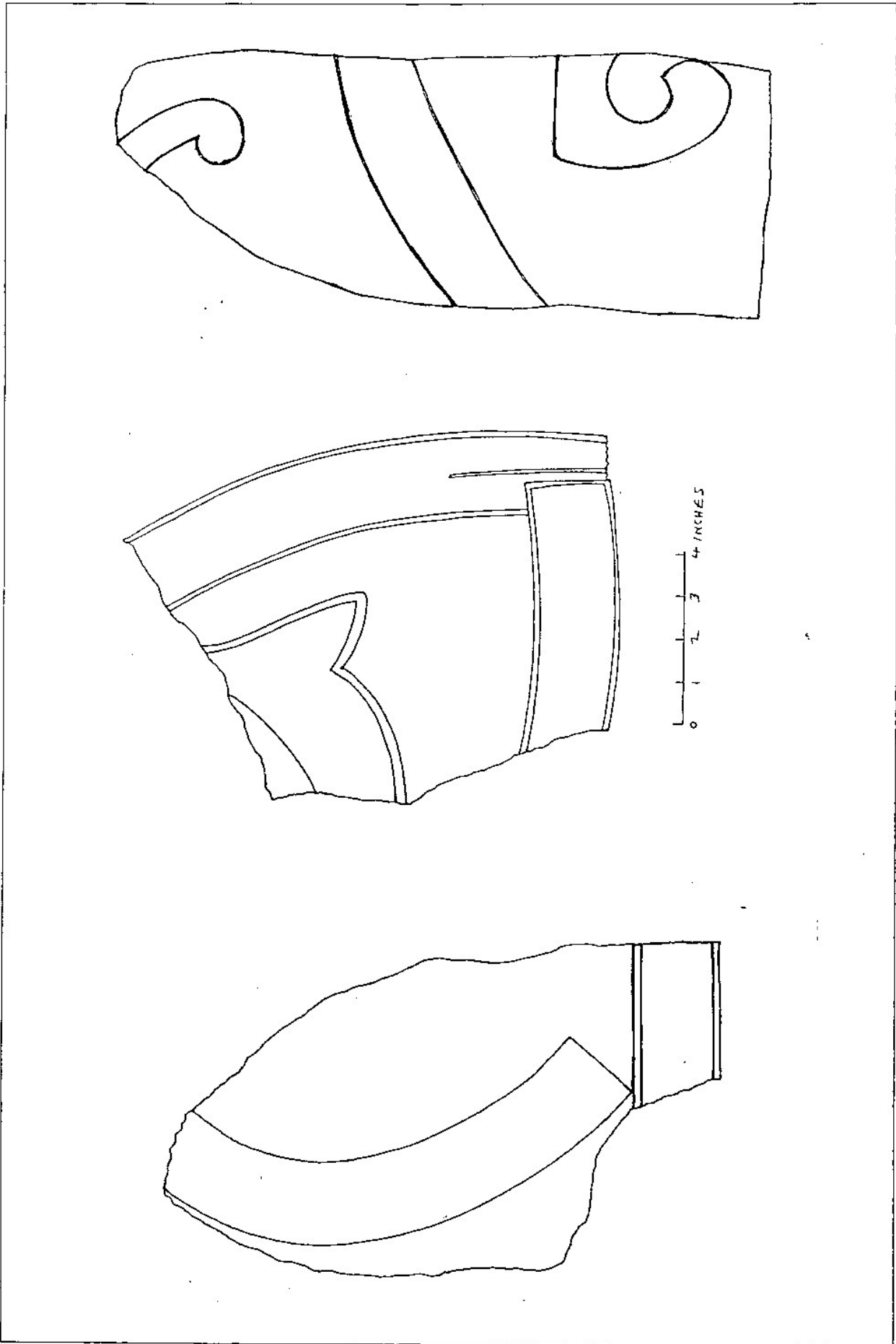


Figure 6. Fragments of strapwork (B)